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Localisedness as a predictor for salience

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1. Introduction

Kerswill & Williams (2002) suggest that salience (in their definition) is ultimately caused by social factors. This raises further questions, though, such as: which social factors are involved in salience? Why and how are linguistic forms and social meanings linked? And how does this affect language perception and processing?

Honeybone & Watson (2013) in their study of Liverpool English (Scouse) phonology based on *Contemporary, Humorous, Localised Dialect Literature* suggest that a likely factor of the social salience of linguistic forms is the form's status as a local variant, indexing local identity. Similar results found in Jensen (2013) for morphosyntactic forms in Tyneside English.

Jensen (2013) defines salience as *the association of social content and linguistic forms in the cognitive domain*.

2. Studies

3 studies of Tyneside English (Newcastle upon Tyne) in Jensen (2013): corpus study, questionnaire study, popular dialect literature study.

Data: NECTE corpus, popular dialect literature, questionnaire.

12 variables in total, focusing here on 4: *divn't*, *wor*, *telt*, *hoy*. These 4 are local and unique variables and were particularly salient to participants in the questionnaire study.



Examples (from NECTE):

1. *I divn't knaa where all my money's gone* (NECTE2 07-08/N/ML/159, male, young, MC)
2. *We're great friends with wor next door neighbours* (NECTE2, 07-08/N/VL/3892, old, female, MC)
3. *It was him who telt me* (TLS28, old, male, WC)
4. *That's it you used to hoy a few currants in* (PVC02a, old, male, MC)

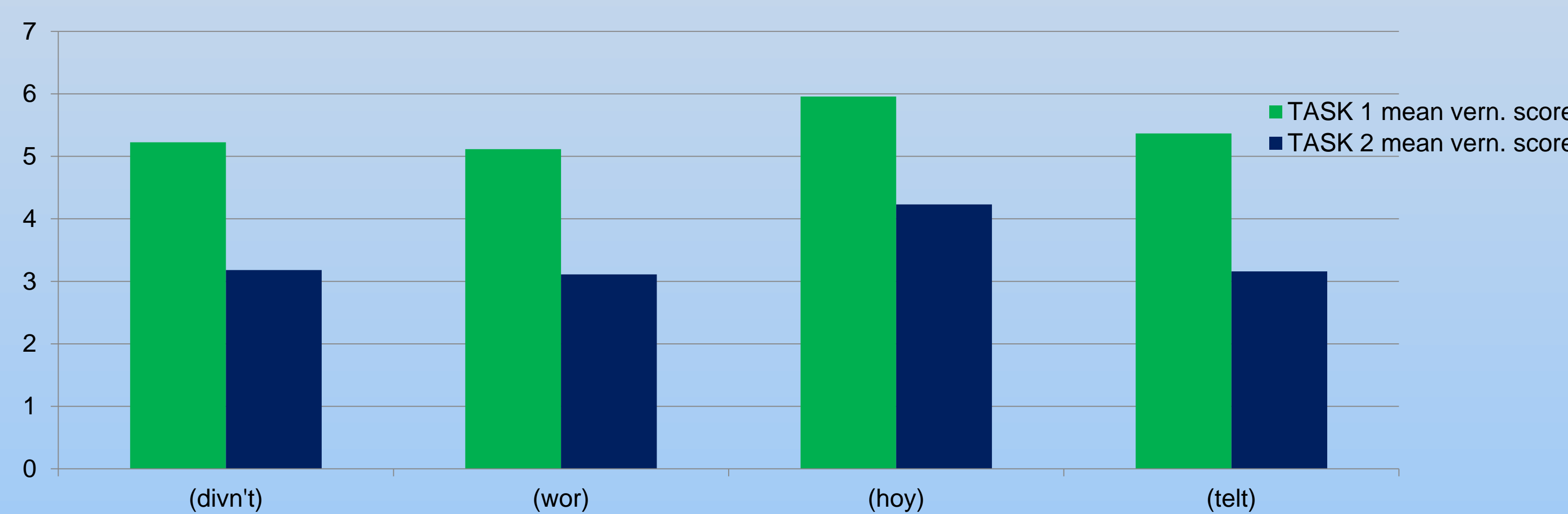
2.1 Questionnaire study

Aim: to test awareness of local morphosyntactic forms and speakers' affiliation with the local community.

3 tasks: a frequency judgment task, a language use and identification task and an affiliation task.

Results: the vernacular forms were rated as more frequently used by other people (task 1) than by participants themselves (task 2). This indicates that some stigma is still attached to the variety.

Figure 1: Task 1+2 ratings (1: not frequent, 7: very frequent)



The identification task showed that participants were competent in identifying the Tyneside vernacular forms correctly, 91% for *wor*, 93% for *divn't*, and 94% for *hoy* and *telt*. Comparisons with scores for frequency judgments ($r = .859$, $n = 12$, $p = .000$, $R^2 = 73.8\%$) and language use ($r = .660$, $n = 12$, $p = .019$, $R^2 = 43.6\%$) showed large positive correlations (based on mean scores for all 12 variables). This shows that participants are able to tune in to vernacular forms and express their perception of their frequency.

Pearson's tests showed significant, positive correlations between participants' affiliation scores and their frequency scores for variables *divn't*, *wor* and *hoy* and language use scores for all four variables.

Table 1: Correlations with local affiliation

	N	Task 1	Task 3	Pearson's	Sign.	Strength	N	Task 2	Task 3	Pearson's	Sign.	Strength
(divn't)	46	5.22	4.94	0.46	0.001	medium	142	3.18	4.96	0.41	0.000	medium
(wor)	48	5.11	5.14	0.44	0.002	medium	141	3.11	4.96	0.31	0.000	medium
(hoy)	48	5.96	5.15	0.48	0.001	medium	141	4.23	4.97	0.36	0.000	medium
(telt)	49	5.37	4.82	0.13	0.382	small	140	3.16	4.96	0.33	0.000	medium

These comparisons are important for the conceptualisation of salience if we want to argue that there is a link between the salience of vernacular morphosyntactic forms and the social value they index in a community.

The correlation between participants' affiliation score and their performance on the identification task showed only a small and non-significant result ($r = .125$, $n = 143$, $p = 0.68$).

2.2 Interpretation of results

Exemplar theory: linguistic exemplars are stored with social information about the speaker who uttered them (Pierrehumbert 2001, Hay, Warren & Drager 2006).

Social indexicality: linguistic forms take on social meaning and index social characteristics in addition to denotational meaning (Silverstein 2003, Eckert 2008, Johnstone 2009).

Enregisterment: linguistic forms form specific register where social value is primary (Agha 2003).

Comparing with the results for the other variables in the questionnaire study (local forms but not unique to Tyneside), ratings of the *divn't*, *wor*, *telt* and *hoy* were significantly different and this indicates that speakers pick up on their local status. These variables thus encapsulate the Tyneside area and this enregistered meaning (as specifically Tyneside) affects their storage in the exemplar framework. Their status as indices of Tyneside local identity can become strengthened over time and speakers become active participants in the construal of social meaning. This link between the social and the cognitive aspects of language is captured by the concept of salience (as defined in section 1).

3. Conclusion

The results from the questionnaire study suggest that social factors such as perceptions of uniqueness and indexical value in the form of localness influence the level of salience of forms. Future research should investigate interactional effects (awareness, affiliation and language use) in more detail and explore the status of 'uniqueness' in other varieties and types of variables.

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